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CBS News

FACE THE NATION

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GUESTS: Lieutenant General RUSSEL HONORE
Commander, Joint Task Force Katrina

Senator MARY LANDRIEU, (D-LA)

Senator SUSAN COLLINS, (R-ME)
Committee on Homeland Security and
Governmental Affairs

JAN CRAWFORD GREENBURG
The Chicago Tribune

MODERATOR: BOB SCHIEFFER - CBS News

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**FACE THE NATION - CBS NEWS
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BOB SCHIEFFER, host:

Today on FACE THE NATION, the aftermath of Katrina: What it tells us about America's vulnerability.

(Footage of people singing the national anthem)

SCHIEFFER: On this fourth anniversary of 9/11, the recovery from the hurricane is finally under way. But are we any more prepared for a terrorist attack than we were four years ago? We go first this morning to Lieutenant General Russel Honore, who's heading the military effort in New Orleans. Then, Louisiana Senator Mary Landrieu, and Susan Collins, who heads the Senate Committee on Homeland Security. And we'll check in with Jan Greenburg, legal analyst of the Chicago Tribune, about next week's hearing on John Roberts, the president's nominee to be the next chief justice. But first, Katrina and the aftermath on FACE THE NATION.

Announcer: FACE THE NATION with CBS News chief Washington correspondent Bob Schieffer. And now from CBS News in Washington, Bob Schieffer.

SCHIEFFER: And good morning again. Joining us from Camp Shelby, Mississippi, Lieutenant General Russel Honore, who's the top military man in the disaster area.

General, good morning to you, and let me just ask you in the beginning here, describe for us the situation as you see it now this morning.

Lieutenant General RUSSEL HONORE (Commander, Joint Task Force Katrina): In New Orleans, as we speak, the water has dropped significantly since the pumping started some few days ago, which gives us total land access to more of the area that need to be searched. We see a significant number of the area, particularly in Mississippi, where the power is coming back on. They're about 80 percent getting power back in Mississippi.

Focusing on New Orleans, the parish of--Orleans Parish, which is hardest hit by floods, and St. Bernard Parish--Jefferson Parish is pretty dry at this time. St. Tammany and Plaquemines Parish are still challenged with power outage, as well as restrictions of roads that have been damaged. Much of the emergency functions are up and running from the perspective of providing food and water, as well as health care in those areas, and we continue to do the detail search in those parish, going house to house, property to property, looking for, making contact with individuals who are at their homes but refuse to leave, and provide food and water as required and any health issues they might have, and--as well as to start the removal of the remains, which is a continuous and a very detailed operation.

But there is progress. Much of the dry area of New Orleans, the contractors are in and starting to work and bring some of that infrastructure online. Over.

SCHIEFFER: Would you say, sir, that you have turned the corner on this?

Lt. Gen. HONORE: I would say we've turned the corner when the city is dry. The local officials--there's a big void now because the first responders were victims. Many of them became--hit very hard by the storm. Their homes were destroyed, in many cases; their families were--had to be evacuated. Much of the local government officials were evacuated. We need to get them back into the city, because they are the ones that know the city the best. That is being worked. We got a couple of hotels coming online that FEMA is going to put in place, so

we can get those people back in town and in the parishes who really know how to make that infrastructure work.

In the meantime, we're doing the best we can to provide enablers and tasks to put computer towers in that enable them to talk better and to be able to communicate and coordinate, but we have a plan. We are making it and executing it in accordance with the parish presidents and the mayors and the governor of Louisiana. It's coming online, but I think we're still in the first phase of this operation. It will take until mid-October to drain all the water--our best estimates--out of New Orleans proper. Over.

SCHIEFFER: General, do you--I think you said earlier this morning it'll be 72 hours before you really have a handle on what the casualty count is, but do you think it will be fewer than the 10,000 that some people said may have died in New Orleans?

Lt. Gen. HONORE: Yes, sir. I think that number was set at a very emotional time in the early days of this crisis, and hours of it, and at that time, since then, we've completed the majority of the evacuation. We evacuated less than 300 citizens yesterday and we're gathering numbers on the citizens we've made contact who decided to stay in their homes. I think as that data starts to come together, the estimates in our search, we have to take--it'll probably take us several days to complete the detailed search of all of the structures that are involved: homes and businesses and other areas. The detailed search will be the only thing that we will get to that will provide us refinement. No modeling at this time. Then you have, on top of that, the fact of normal mortality rate put in there, and the state health official is the only one that is authorized to release any numbers, considering the sensitivity of this issue with families who are still looking for loved ones. But to answer your question specifically, I think we can expect that number to be a lot lower than what was initially given out in that emotional moment. Over.

SCHIEFFER: General, this is the anniversary of 9/11, as you well know. As you look at this, what do you think the lessons are for the nation here should we come under attack by terrorists at some point? And God help us, let's hope it never happens. But what are the lessons you take away from this as you think about that, which we all have to do?

Lt. Gen. HONORE: It would be a little early for me at this time to start talking about lessons learned without full analysis, because sometimes when you're in the middle of the storm, you're working off your perceptions and there's a bigger picture of other things happening. And we need to put that in context, so...

SCHIEFFER: All right. All right. Well, General, thank you so much, and good luck and godspeed in your work.

Lt. Gen. HONORE: God bless you and God bless America. And we ask everyone to help take care of the evacuees, assist them in any way in taking care of themselves and linking back up with their families. On a bright side of hope, many of the people in the Astrodome are now linking up with families and friends. That's a good sign, and there's light at the end of the tunnel here. Over.

SCHIEFFER: All right. Thank you, sir.

And from Mississippi, we go now to New York, where Senator Susan Collins is standing by. She chairs the Senate Homeland Security Committee, and here in DC, Senator Mary Landrieu of Louisiana.

Of course, Senator Landrieu, let me ask you the question that a lot of people are asking: Do you think that some of these casualties could have been averted had control been turned over to the federal government sooner?

Sen. MARY LANDRIEU (Democrat, Louisiana): Well, that is a very important question, but I can tell you on the ground in Louisiana that the local elected officials, governor, local parish president and mayors, did everything they could to save lives, to issue a strong evacuation plan. That was carried out. An emergency declaration was issued, Bob, before the storm, asking for full federal resources. Why those resources didn't come, why they were stopped in Washington, I don't know, but what I do know is that we will all be held accountable, from the White House down, and blaming local elected officials is not the way to get the rebuilding process under way.

SCHIEFFER: Do you think the White House is trying to put the blame on local officials?

Sen. LANDRIEU: I am unfortunately aware that, yes, they are. While the president is saying he wants to work together as a team, I think the White House operatives have a full-court press on to blame state and local officials, whether they're Republicans or Democrats, whether it's Haley Barbour or Kathleen Blanco, whether it's Mayor Nagin or a Republican mayor from Mississippi. And it's very unfortunate. This federal government has an obligation to support our local and state officials particularly in times of tragedy and distress, not to pile on them, not to make their suffering worse, but to lighten their load, and I hope the federal government will do that. It's been years of neglect from not investing, and as Susan Collins will tell you, one of the big lack of investments is in a communications system that would allow locals to communicate with each other, and that's a lesson that we should have learned after 9/11 and we will learn again, unfortunately, this week.

SCHIEFFER: That's a very strong charge you've just leveled. What are some examples of that?

Sen. LANDRIEU: Well, I think that there are journalists throughout town that can give you those examples, and I'll be happy to provide more detail as the week unfolds. But it's been very unfortunate, I think, that there is an effort under way to blame the local and state officials, Republicans and Democrats, black and white, and it's not fair, and it shouldn't be done. As I said, we should not be blaming anyone right now, but we will all be held accountable. And right now we need to focus, Bob, on burying our dead, comforting those that are still crying and in great distress, finding housing for those that need housing, and giving a lot of relief, thinking outside of the box, to how we're going to stand up, not just New Orleans, but St. Bernard, St. Tammany, Plaquemines Parish and the whole Gulf Coast region, which is extremely valuable to this nation as an energy coast, as a port, a major port in the world, and as a significant economic engine for the nation.

SCHIEFFER: Senator Collins, you, of course, are the chairman of the Homeland Security Committee in the Senate. You have oversight over all of these agencies involved. As you think about this, what lessons do you draw from this that need be applied to preparing for a terrorist attack, should there be one? Because that's why the Homeland Security administration was created. That was the basic reason.

Senator SUSAN COLLINS (Republican, Maine): Bob, when I first saw the initial response and the evident lack of preparedness for this natural disaster, all I could think of is what if this had been a terrorist attack, for which we had had absolutely no advance warning, instead of a

natural disaster that had been predicted for years and for which there were dire, specific warnings in the days that preceded it? This really was the first test since 9/11 of our national emergency response systems at the state, local and federal level, and they fell short. I think at this point it's far more important that we fix problems rather than fix blame, and our immediate focus has to be on helping those hundreds of thousands of families who have been displaced by this terrible event.

SCHIEFFER: Senator, you were one of those who backed the creation of the Department of Homeland Security. On reflection, do you think now that FEMA should not be a part of that giant bureaucracy, or should the relationship be changed in some way?

Sen. COLLINS: That's a question that our oversight review will take a close look at. My inclination is to say that FEMA does belong in the Department of Homeland Security. It would be very involved in any response to a terrorist attack, and being in the department should give FEMA better access to intelligence information, to other agencies such as the Coast Guard, that help in search and rescue, and to the state and local preparedness offices that are within the department. We need to take a look, however, at whether FEMA has sufficient resources, leadership and whether it should have a stronger authority to deal with state and local governments. My inclination is it belongs to the department, but we should take a look at that as part of our review.

SCHIEFFER: So what you're saying is you're going to try to find out was it a failure of structure or a failure of leadership? Now the president has replaced the head of FEMA, Michael Brown, and brought him back to Washington. Do you think he should be removed from the federal payroll?

Sen. COLLINS: That's really the president's call, but I support Secretary Chertoff's decision to put a Coast Guard admiral above Michael Brown and put him in charge of the recovery effort. The Coast Guard's preparedness was far greater than the other agencies involved in the recovery effort, and I think it makes sense for the Coast Guard admiral to be in charge.

SCHIEFFER: Let me ask you, Senator Landrieu--I mean, I would take it that Mr. Brown really needs a job to remain in the position after being basically humiliated by being taken--relieved of command, as it were. Should the taxpayers continue to pay him, or would it be best to give him his what we used to call on the carpenter job his drag-up check and send him on his way?

Sen. LANDRIEU: Well, that's a very good question. As Senator Collins said, that's the president's decision. But obviously, he didn't measure up to the task. But in his defense, if there's any defense of Mike Brown, and very little, even if he had been Superman, I'm not sure he could have carried out the job because of the lack of resources in FEMA. And while I respect Susan Collins as one of the leading experts on this and truly do as one of the most thoughtful senators on this subject, I think we are going to have to examine: Is FEMA rightfully positioned? Should it be elevated? At least should it be given more freedom of the budget? Because that red tape in the beginning days literally put the city underwater. So we've got, Susan, to look at that very carefully and work through that.

But one thing that I do know that I don't need any more studies or review, is, Bob, our communications system in this country--I'm talking about cell phones, towers, BlackBerrys, satellite radios, interoperability of our first responders, must be corrected. We should have corrected it after 9/11. As I said when those police officers and firefighters ran into the building four years ago today, they knew that their radios weren't going to operate but they went in

anyway. That's how brave and courageous they were. The least the federal government can do is get this communications system stood up. The private sector knows how to do it. We've got to get it stood up, and that's one thing I'm going to work with Susan Collins and Joe Lieberman on doing.

SCHIEFFER: Are you satisfied with the federal effort now?

Sen. LANDRIEU: I am not satisfied with the federal effort in many instances across the board. Now we're making progress, and General Honore has been terrific, working with General Anginou of our National Guard. The admiral from the Coast Guard, Admiral Allen, is--great confidence, brings great credentials, and I have to say, along with Susan Collins, Senator Collins, what a great job the Coast Guard did for us. The commandant told me himself they saved 32,000 people from--either by helicopter or boat. So did our Wildlife and Fisheries, Bob. We had 600 boats in the water from the state government pulling people out of the water. My brother, the lieutenant governor, was in one of those boats, pulling people out himself. It was an extraordinary rescue effort. Well, the story will be told and there will be many heroes at the local level and the Coast Guard that made those rescues possible.

SCHIEFFER: Senator Collins, let me ask you, finally, some of the members of your party and people associated with your party, from Barbara Bush to Speaker Hastert, have said maybe New Orleans ought to be bulldozed. Has that hurt Republicans?

Sen. COLLINS: I think that all Americans, regardless of their party affiliation, feel so strongly about helping those who have been so--who have lost so much due to Hurricane Katrina, and my hope is that we can all come together, help to rebuild New Orleans, rebuild Mississippi and the parts of Alabama, and give the comfort and assistance to the hundreds of thousands of people affected.

SCHIEFFER: All right. Well, I want to thank both of you for being with us this morning. We'll be back in just a minute to talk about the Supreme Court and those hearings next week on John Roberts.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: Well, we all know the old saying about if a tree falls in the forest and no one hears or sees it, did it really fall? And in some ways, that's been the case in news. This story has been so overwhelming that we have some major stories going on that have literally gone unreported. Baghdad, for one, of course, and the other, the hearings that opened this week on a new chief justice for the Supreme Court, John Roberts. So we've asked Jan Crawford Greenburg, who covers the court for the Chicago Tribune, to come in and sort of give us a little report. Did anything happen while the hurricane was going on that we need to know about? And what's going to happen next week--or this week, Jan?

Ms. JAN CRAWFORD GREENBURG (Chicago Tribune): Well, I mean, obviously, quite a lot this past week. We had a nomination. John Roberts was supposed to take Justice O'Connor's spot. But when the chief justice died, the president moved him over to take the top spot to become the chief justice. They pushed back the hearings a bit. Those hearings will begin tomorrow. Opening statements will begin tomorrow with questioning by the senators starting on Tuesday and continuing throughout the day on Wednesday, with a vote possible early next week. Now some Democrats have urged the other fellow--their colleagues to hold off on a vote, because they want to see who the president is going to nominate to take Justice Sandra Day O'Connor's place, but the White House has suggested it is willing to wait. It

wants to stand firm, get John Roberts through, get him confirmed, then make an announcement on who will take that O'Connor vacancy.

SCHIEFFER: Before all this happened and before Chief Justice Rehnquist died, the talk was that John Roberts was going to be confirmed. There would be, you know, extended questioning, but that in the end he would be confirmed. Now Justice Rehnquist has died. He's been nominated for the chief justice job and this hurricane has come along. Has any of that changed what we'll be seeing this week?

Ms. GREENBURG: The outcome is unlikely to change. He will be, by--most believe, confirmed to be chief justice of the United States, but the dynamics have shifted. Some senators, Democrats, think that they need a close examination of his views because he's going to be in the top spot. Others say this isn't nearly as significant because the--Chief Justice Rehnquist was very conservative. We're replacing a conservative with a conservative, so they're willing to relax a little bit and put the focus on the O'Connor replacement, the moderate Justice O'Connor on a court that's divided five-to-four. That vacancy could make a difference for a very long time.

SCHIEFFER: Well, what's the guessing game now on who the president will nominate? And will he nominate him anytime soon to--as to fill the vacancy created by Justice O'Connor's retirement?

Ms. GREENBURG: The president suggested he wants to wait and get him confirmed. First lady Laura Bush said in comments this week that we're not going to see a nominee before John Roberts is confirmed. The White House has not sent any signals on who it's looking at. Conservative groups fear he's going to turn to his attorney general, Alberto Gonzales. They don't think he's quite conservative enough. The next couple weeks, we'll start hearing more information on that.

SCHIEFFER: To be continued. Thank you, Jan. And we'll be back with a final word in just a minute.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: In the midst of the disaster along the coast, let us pause now to remember what happened four years ago today when we were blindsided by a heartless enemy. We were attacked that day by terrorists willing to take the lives of innocent people to advance their cause, but that day we also saw what sets us apart from such an enemy. We saw Americans who were willing to risk and, in many cases, give their lives to save the innocent.

That is the part that we must tell our children, because that is who we are and what we want them to be. The brave firemen and policemen of New York, the passengers who gave their lives to force down hijacked Flight 93 before it could be crashed into the US Capitol, and so many others showed us that day what true heroism is. Led by a decisive mayor, New York rescue teams saved countless lives as the untested young president found just the right words to rally the nation.

This time it did not happen that way. Local officials all but panicked. Officials at the highest level were tongue-tied, full of excuses but unable to find the words to give the nation comfort or confidence. But as the government fumbled, the American people did not. Charities appeared from nowhere. People opened their hearts, homes, their schools. 'Bring them on,' went out the cry from Texas to Utah. No, these poor people in shelters are not better off than they were

off back home, but they will live to see a better day. The government dropped the ball last week, but the good and great American people picked it up, as they always do, thank God.

CBS News is beginning a special effort to help the hundreds of children separated from their families by Hurricane Katrina. Here are two of the missing: Desiree Gillam, who is 18 years old, from New Orleans. She is missing, with her twin sister Dellare Gillam. If you recognize either of these children, call 1 (800) THE-LOST or log on to missingkids.com.

That's it for us. We'll see you next week on FACE THE NATION.